

XXVIII. *Description and Use of the Cabbage-bark Tree of Jamaica.* By William Wright, M. D.; communicated by Richard Brocklesby, M. D. F. R. S.

Read May 1, 1777. **T**HE Cabbage-bark tree, or Worm-bark tree, grows in most parts of Jamaica, and particularly abounds in the low Savannahs of St. Mary and St. George. It rises to a considerable height, but no great thickness, sending off branches towards the top of a straight, smooth trunk. The leaves are, when young, of a light-green hue; when full-grown, of a dark-green colour; and before they drop, of a rusty appearance.

The flower-spike is long and beautifully branched. The flowers are numerous; their *calyces* of a dark purple; their *petals* of the colour of the pale-rose; the *nectaria* must contain much honey, as thousands of bees, beetles of various kinds, butter-flies, and humming-birds, are continually feeding thereon.

The *pericarpium* is a green, hard fruit, of the size of the smaller plumb. The skin is of the thickness of a crown-piece; and tastes very austere. The kernel is covered with a brown skin like that of other nuts; it is very hard, and tastes astringent.

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The wood is hard, and takes a good polish. It is however fit only for rafters or other parts of small buildings; but this tree is valued chiefly for its bark, which externally is of a grey colour, and the inside black and furrowed.

Fresh cabbage-bark tastes mucilaginous, sweet, and insipid. Its smell, however, is rather disagreeable, and it retains it in the decoction; hence by some called the bulge-water tree.

Mr. PETER DUGUID, formerly of this island, seems to have been the first that gave any account of the virtues of this bark, in the *Edinburgh Essays, Physical and Literary*, vol. II. The experiments he promised have never yet appeared. It is certain it has powerful effects, and its anthelmintic quality is established by the experience of several ages. It is at present in general use here, and begins to be known in Europe. No description having yet appeared, I have supplied that defect as far as my abilities in Botany reached. It remains now to proceed to its exhibition, and the purposes it is meant to answer as a medicine.

Cabbage-bark may be given in different forms; as in decoction, syrup, powder, and extract. I have used them all, and shall speak of them separately.

The decoction. Take fresh-dried or well-preserved cabbage-bark, one ounce. Boil it in a quart of water, over a slow fire, till the water is of an amber colour, or rather of deep coloured Madeira wine; strain it off, sweeten it with sugar, and let it be used immediately, as it does not keep many days.

Syrup of Cabbage-bark. To any quantity of the above decoction add a double portion of sugar, and make a syrup. This will retain its virtues for years.

The extract of cabbage-bark is made by evaporating the strong decoction in *balneo marie* to the proper consistence; it must be continually stirred, as otherwise the resinous part rises to the top, and on this probably its efficacy depends.

The powder of well-dried bark is easily made, and looks like jallap, though not of equal specific gravity.

This bark, like most other powerful anthelmintics, has a narcotic effect; and on this account it is always proper to begin with small doses, which may be gradually increased till a nausea is excited, when the dose for that patient is ascertained. But by frequent use we can in common determine the dose, though we chuse to err rather on the safe side.

A strong healthy grown person may, at first, take four table spoonfuls of the decoction or syrup, three grains of the extract, or thirty grains of the powder for a dose.

A youth,

A youth, three table spoonfuls of the decoction or fy-rup, two grains of extract, or twenty grains of powder.

A person of ten years of age, two table spoonfuls of the decoction or fy-rup, one grain and a half of extract, or fifteen grains of the powder.

Children of two or three years old, a table spoonful of the decoction or fy-rup, one grain of extract, or ten grains of the powder. Children of a year old, half the quantity.

These may be increased, as above observed, till a nausea is excited, which will depend on the strength, sex, and habit of body of the patient.

Care must be taken that cold water be not drank during the operation of this medicine, as it is in this case apt to occasion sickness, vomiting, fever, and delirium. When this happens, or when an over large dose has been given, the stomach must be washed with warm water: the patient must speedily be purged with Castor-oil and use plenty of lime-juice beverage for common drink; vegetable acid being a powerful antidote in this case, as well as in an over dose of opium.

The decoction is what is mostly given here, and seldom fails to perform every thing that can be expected from an anthelmintic medicine, by destroying worms in the intestines, and bringing them away in great quantities. By frequent use, however, these animals become familiarized,

liarized, and we find it necessary to intermit it, or have recourse to others of inferior merit.

The writers of the Edinburgh Medical Commentaries take notice, that the decoction of cabbage-bark always excites vomiting. We find no such effect from it here, and may account for it by their receiving it in a mouldy state. A syrup, therefore, is given there with better effect. They observe also that it has a diuretic virtue, which we have not taken notice of here.

This bark purges pretty briskly, especially in powder, thirty or forty grains working as well as jallap by stool; but in this way it does not seem to kill worms so well as in decoction.

Five grains of the extract made a strong man sick, and purged him several times; but, by frequent use, he took ten grains to produce at length the same effect.

It must not be concealed that fatal accidents have happened from the imprudent administration of this bark, chiefly from over-dosing the medicine. But this cannot detract from the merit of the cabbage-bark, since the best medicines, when abused, become deleterious; and even our best aliments, in too great quantity, prove destructive. Upon the whole, the cabbage-bark is a most valuable remedy, and I hope will become an addition to the *materia medica*.

GEOFFRÆA JAMAICENSIS INERMIS.

FOL. opposita, oblongo-ovata, ternata, acuminata, superne glabra, inferne enervia, petiolis brevibus.

CAL. *Perianthium* monophyllum, campanulatum, levissimè quinquepartitum, *laciniis* ovatis, brevibus.

COR. papilionacea: *Vexillum* subrotundum, concavum: *Ale* obtusæ, concavæ, longitudine vexilli. *Carina* ovata, patens, in duabus partibus levissimè divisa.

STAM. diadelphea, decem, filiformia, in calyce inserta, longitudine alarum. *Anthere* subrotundæ.

PIST. subulatum, filiforme. *Stigma* nullum. *Germen* ovato-oblongum, compressum.

PER. *Drupa* sub-ovata, magna.

SEM. *Nux* sub-ovata, sub-lignea, sulco utrinque longitudinali, bivalvis.

The botanical reader will see how nearly this agrees with the *Geoffræa spinosa* of LINNÆUS. The Genera of plants are sufficiently multiplied, and it was thought best to make this a species only.









Geoffraea jasagoides



jamaicensis inermis

J. Basire Sculp



Geoffraea jamaicensis inermis